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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2397
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 8141
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0263
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ APR 9377
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 6107
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 1514
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 6758
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 4374
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0175
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 001418

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [VZ](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: POLO SENATOR PETRO ON CHAVEZ, AN URIBE THIRD TERM,
AND POLO POLITICS

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer.
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Polo Party Senator Gustavo Petro speculated that Venezuelan President Chavez -- fearing what might be in the Raul Reyes' computers -- appears to be rethinking his involvement in humanitarian negotiations or unilateral liberation of FARC-held hostages. Petro claimed President Uribe will delay his decision on whether to try for a third term until after the U.S. presidential elections in November, adding that the Polo would find it impossible to defeat either Uribe or an Urbista candidate in Colombia's 2010 presidential race. Petro said the internal battle between the Polo's pragmatists and communists for control of the party continues, but he noted that the communists have the edge. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Opposition Polo Democratico Senator Gustavo Petro told us April 14, that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez appears to be rethinking his involvement in humanitarian negotiations or unilateral liberation of FARC-held hostages in the wake of the March 1 GOC operation against Secretariat member Raul Reyes in Ecuador. Chavez did not anticipate the GOC strike in Ecuador, fears what might be in the Reyes' computers, and understands that this limits his scope for international action on behalf of the FARC. Petro outlined his belief that Uribe authorized the raid in part to reduce the FARC's and Chavez' international political space.

¶3. (C) Petro said Chavez committed multiple political mistakes during his involvement as facilitator of a humanitarian exchange--in large part because he relied exclusively on Senator Piedad Cordoba and the FARC for advice on Colombian politics. Chavez did not consult with his Ambassador in Bogota, Pavel Rondon, and ignored the Cubans. Petro said the FARC vetoed any consultations between Chavez and the Polo. He speculated that further progress on a humanitarian accord is frozen absent pressure or a gesture, such as transfers by the USG of convicted FARC criminals "Simon Trinidad" and "Sonia" from U.S. prisons to a third country.

14. (C) Petro speculated that President Uribe remains undecided on whether he will seek a constitutional amendment that would allow him to run for a third term. Uribe will not make a final decision until after the U.S. elections in November, since he does not want to be left isolated. Petro said that if Uribe runs again, he would easily win reelection. It would be impossible for any Polo candidate to defeat Uribe or any "Uribista" candidate in the 2010 presidential elections, because the continued existence of the FARC makes voters reluctant to entrust the presidency to a left-wing party. He said the only opportunity for the Polo to defeat an Uribista candidate would be as part of a broader coalition with the Liberal Party or with an independent candidate such as former Medellin Mayor Sergio Fajardo. Petro dismissed Polo President Carlos Gaviria's prospects, noting that he is an academic, not a politician.

15. (C) Petro voiced frustration over the continuing internal battle for control of the Polo between more pragmatic, moderate leftist elements and its sectarian, orthodox communist wing. The communist elements -- led by the Independent Revolutionary Workers Movement (MOIR), Colombian Communist Party, and the Federation of Colombian Teachers (FECODE) -- largely control the party machinery and use this power to shape Polo policies and candidates. He said former-Bogota Mayor Lucho Garzon hopes to wrest control from communists during the August election of regional Polo officials and delegates to the National Party Congress. Petro predicted this effort would fail, noting that internal Polo elections are dominated by party militants. He added that current Bogota Mayor Samuel Moreno is using patronage to build his influence within the party, but suggested Moreno would also side with the communists. Petro supports the

moderate elements.

16. (C) Petro said Polo leaders believe Plan Colombia has failed to reduce Colombia's narcotrafficking problem. The party remains critical of U.S. military aid as well as the aerial spray program. He claimed the emphasis on counternarcotics and military action merely worsens conditions in the rural areas, ensuring a steady flow of new recruits for the FARC and other illegal armed groups. Petro said the USG should shift its assistance from security aid to agrarian reform. This could support a GOC policy based on military pressure, social reform, and a willingness to explore peace talks with the FARC and ELN. Petro conceded that many of his Polo colleagues do not accept the need for a military component, seeing negotiations as the only solution to Colombia's conflict, but said a growing number of Polo members now recognize the military must play a role.

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